



COUNTRY STUDY

SPAIN

Country monitoring report 2016

Youth in Spain was hit the hardest by the economic crisis and the following stagnation on the market, however, the situation seems to start to improve since last year. Currently 23% of young Spanish are neither in employment, education or training (NEETs). This is the lowest level since 2008 and the beginning of Great Recession. Similarly to other EU countries, foreign-born youth is more likely to become a NEET. Currently the NEET rate among this group is at 32%. The situation on the labour market is not favourable for young people, only half of them is active and about 33.1% remains unemployed. Moreover, the majority of NEETs are long-term unemployed, and two third of the entire population of NEETs is registered with public employment services.

NEETs in Spain continue to be considered as one of the biggest societal challenges. Although many programs, tools and mechanisms at EU level have been activated to try to help these young people (such as the Youth Guarantee, skill validation systems, specific occupational integration programs, etc.), a large number of young people are not responding to these interventions because they are socially excluded and cannot be reached as they are not registered at public employment services. An analysis of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee shows that in Spain the programme only reaches 10.7% of NEETs and unemployed youth.



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Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning

In 2015 9.9% of Spanish people participated in Lifelong Learning (LLL), which is close to the EU average of 10.7%. Over the past few years the numbers have been stable, however more and more people are getting acquainted with the concept of Lifelong Learning, therefore the demand for learning and training is increasing. Furthermore, the Spanish government has pledged to make efforts to improve Lifelong Learning. In the framework of the *Operational Programme for Employment, Training and Education*, one of the priorities is dedicated to *“improving equal access to Lifelong Learning for all age groups in formal structures, non-formal and informal learning and knowledge, professional skills and capabilities of workers and promoting flexible learning pathways, also through career guidance and validation of skills acquired.”*

In 2015 Spain has launched an initiative to boost participation in Lifelong Learning amongst employed workers. The reform has introduced an individual right to 20 hours of education and training leave for each employee working for at least one year.

In Spain, LLL is perceived as one of the fundamental points of support to try to recover the population that has been early separated from the education system, reintegrating the circuit as a support to ensure their access to the labour market on more favourable terms.

Coordination and cooperation between administrations and organisations, as social agents, is necessary, as these are closer to the citizens. They ensure that the information and guidance flows in

all directions, based on the personal diversity and counting special measures of access to information and procedures for disadvantaged groups.

Vocational Education and Training

Despite major efforts in promoting participation in Vocational Education and Training (VET), the participation rate remains below the EU average, where only two out of five students takes up professional education. VET has been promoted as one of the possible solutions to support early school leavers, yet the new “basic vocational education and training” two-year program for low skilled students, that needed to reach out to medium levels, turned out to be not as successful as planned.¹ Spanish government has been working on reforming its VET system to increase its attractiveness and provision of qualifications relevant to needs of labour market. One of the overarching aims is to better prepare and equip young people with the needed skills and competences. This is being done by revising the catalogue of diplomas, fostering dual education, enhancing mobility and aligning Spanish VET with ECVET principles.

Since 2015 training for employment system was reformed, making the public employment services in charge of it. This is diminishing the power of trade unions and employers’ associations within the governance structures.

In the opinion of SOLIDAR Foundation’s Spanish members there is an ideological approach behind the recent education reform. It was designed to “promote employability routes and encourage entrepreneurship” to “provide the ability to compete successfully” and to “provide access to highly skilled jobs, which shows a commitment to economic growth.” According to these guidelines the educational aspects are

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/monitor2016-es_en.pdf



subordinated to the demands of the economic system, without any criticism of the inequalities caused by the current model. The goal of education is no longer the development of the person in all its dimensions, but the competitiveness and individual success. It contributes to the segregation between those who have resources and those who don't. Pupils with more educational difficulties are invited to switch to VET instead of compensating inequalities.

Validation of NFIL

Spain has several validation frames, covering different education levels. One of the main articulations for validation is the Royal Decree 1224/2009 on the recognition of skills acquired through work experience. This Royal Decree established that public administrations (the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Employment, together with the Autonomous Communities) must establish public calls in order to accredit the professional competences of those individuals who wish to see them recognised. In addition to the Royal Decree 1224/2009, the Spanish education system has other validation tools: access exams to VET and university studies aimed at those people who do not have the required qualifications, with possibility of partial exemption of Modules of a VET Diploma and exams to gain the VET Diploma without having undertaken any formal training courses.

Validation in Spain is mainly led by the public administrations. When looking at the development and implementation of the Royal Decree 1224/2009, the private sector has mainly had the role of advisor and it has informed and advised individuals on the validation calls. This document could be seen as one of the greatest so far when it comes to the impact on recognition of professional competences acquired by work experience. Moreover it has greatly contributed to raising awareness on validation and recognition

of learning outcomes of non-formal and informal learning (NFIL). Additionally this has contributed to strengthening and promoting the concept of Lifelong Learning within the society.

The main obstacle to further development of validation arrangements in Spain are currently faced economic constraints. Should there be increase in funding, more beneficiaries could have been reached and their needs met. Validation procedures still need to be updated to the existing needs of society and the labour market. A number of civil society organisations are working towards recognition of skills and competences developed through volunteering.

Furthermore, our Spanish members also stress that it is necessary to establish a system of validation of skills that does not require passage through the formal education system, and equates the experience with basic educational levels. The long process outlined for the issuance of Certificates of Competency Validation is a clear disadvantage. It becomes therefore necessary to set a shorter and simpler procedure based on the training of the agents involved in the validation process that favours and expedite the procedure. In addition, it is urgent to solve the irregularity of the implementation of the procedure in the Spanish territory, as has been done by entities with different powers in each region.

Early-school Leaving

One of the biggest problems that Spain is facing within the education and training system is a high level of early school leavers. When the EU average rate is 11%, in Spain one out of five students drops out from school (20%). It is important to acknowledge the efforts taken by Spanish government in the last years to bring down these number by implementing National Plan to reduce Early School Leaving and by promoting vocational education and training as panacea. Just in 2008, the rate of early school leavers in Spain was above 30% and since then it continues to



decline.

Moreover to a decline in ESL number contributes as well the return to school of all those young pupils who decided to abandon education to get a job. With the economic crisis, a big number of them are returning to school as they can no longer work. Further developments are expected through the implementation of the two-year basic vocational training set up by the Organic Law for the Improvement of the Quality of Education.

Our Spanish members underline that an important fact to be considered is the social background of young people who drop out, since 40,2% of the cases come from homes whose parents have no education or only primary education; 55,1% of the cases from homes whose parents have secondary studies; and only 4,7% are children of parents with higher education. The relationship between the education level of parents and the early abandonment is therefore obvious, as is also the economic level. It is a fact that the dropout rate is three times higher in households with a level of low income regarding families with higher income.

According to the Spanish expert group, it is particularly essential to improve and extend orientation, strengthen its support, especially to youth, women and vulnerable groups. Additionally, it is also important to promote the access to official documentation and information to educational guidance teams from Secondary Schools. Lack of needed funding is contributing negatively to fight educational inequalities and support disadvantaged students.

NEETs

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NEETs in Spain continue to be considered as one of the biggest societal challenges. Although many programs, tools and mechanisms at EU level have been activated to try to help these young people (such as the Youth Guarantee, skill validation systems, specific occupational integration programs, etc.), a large number of young people are not responding to these interventions because they are socially excluded and cannot be reached as they are not registered at public employment services. An analysis of the implementation of the Youth Guarantee shows that in Spain the programme only reaches 10.7% of NEETs and unemployed youth.

Although some actions have been taken at regional level to improve outreach to non-registered young people not in employment, education or training and regional employment services are expected to scale-up their involvement, delays in the implementation of these measures raise strong concerns about the coverage of the national Youth Guarantee system. So far, national Youth Guarantee system is not bringing the expected results, and faces a scale of problems related to collaboration with partners, coordination with stakeholders etc. The involvement of educational authorities as well as regional authorities who are in charge of employment services to provide a young person with an offer of job, training, apprenticeship is still not detailed.

Additionally, the scarcity of complementary national funding as well as political impasse could contribute ² <http://www.oecd.org/spain/sag2016-spain.pdf>



to undermining the implementation of the Youth Guarantee in the medium and long-term.

According to our Spanish members, it is necessary to set up a real coordination and cooperation between administrations, organisations and social agents, to help improve the employability of a group of young NEETs. It is particularly important to tackle this problem from a cross-sectoral perspective, and the role of non-governmental organisations can be a key to reaching them.

Citizenship education

By the introduction of the Education reform (LOMCE) in December 2013, the civic education subject 'Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights' (EfC) taught in elementary, secondary, and baccalaureate programs was dropped out. Instead, the LOMCE introduced the subject of *Social and Civic Values* (SCV for six levels of the Elementary School, and Ethical Values or Religion subjects, for four levels of Secondary School). LOMCE also introduced the subject of Religion, as an academic value, and established it as an alternative to Citizenship Education. Consequently, students should choose Social and Civic Values or Religion as a course.

Several Regional Governments showed their disagreement with the measure and announced that they would take compensatory measures. Andalusia announced that the contents that the Ministry had cut would be introduced in the autonomous curriculum making use of their legislative quota. Later, when the LOMCE established the new subjects of Social and Civic Values, Andalusia announced that it would introduce EfC as an alternative subject.

Education for citizenship in Spain has been used by various governments as a political weapon. After autonomous elections were held in March 2015, and with the Popular Party (PP) losing power in some autonomous communities, the new governments announced that they will reintroduce 'Education

for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights' in their curricula. In 2016 the Minister for Education has expressed the governments' commitment³ to work towards prevention of violence at schools and promoting civic education and fundamental values and include European history and values in school curricula. Moreover, resulting from the commitment to the Paris Declaration two projects on prevention and detection of racism and xenophobia discrimination and intolerance were developed.

Spanish members of SOLIDAR Foundation stressed that it is essential that Spain works on a comprehensive strategy of integration of education for citizenship and peaceful coexistence, which focuses on students and not on the political interests of the parties, regulated by law and sustained with the necessary resources.

Council recommendations

"The increasingly rapid change in the sectoral composition of employment that Spain has been witnessing since 2008 has been accompanied by an increase in skills mismatches. The low overall skills level constrains the transition towards higher value-added activities and hampers productivity growth. Despite a high level of tertiary education attainment, skills supply is not sufficiently aligned with labour market needs and employability rates for recent tertiary graduates are among the lowest in Europe, with a significant proportion employed in jobs that do not require a university degree. Furthermore, despite a slight improvement over the past five years, partly supported by initiatives to increase business representation on university governing boards, cooperation between universities and businesses remains weak. The reduced mobility of academics, the rigidity of the university governance system and the administrative barriers faced by the Offices for the Transfer of Research outcomes (Oficinas de transferencia de resultados de investigación)

³ <http://www.mecd.gob.es/prensa-mecd/actualidad/2016/11/20161107-bruselas.html>



compound obstacles to closer cooperation.”

“In this context Council has provided a following recommendation to Spain: Take further measures to improve the labour market relevance of tertiary education, including by providing incentives for cooperation between universities, firms and research. Increase performance-based funding of public research bodies and universities and foster R&I investment by the private sector.”

[Source: EUR-Lex, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2016.299.01.0007.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2016:299:TOC]

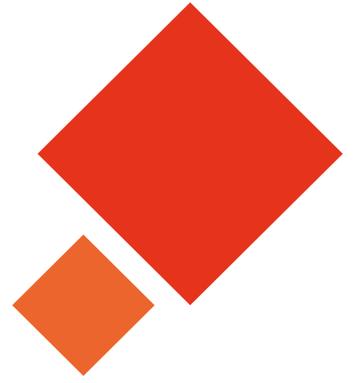


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As part of the Lifelong Learning Watch SOLIDAR Foundation has developed 12 country studies in 2016 covering the status in different Member States when it comes to; Promoting access and participation in Lifelong Learning, Vocational Education and Training, Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (NFIL), Early-school Leaving, NEETs and Citizenship education in reference to 2016 Council's country-specific recommendations.

The SOLIDAR Foundation is the cooperation platform of SOLIDAR; a European network of NGOs working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR brings together 60 member organisations based in 25 EU member states and in 6 candidate countries. We work together in Social Affairs, International Cooperation and Lifelong Learning. The Building Learning Societies pillar includes 23 members, covering 18 EU member states.

SOLIDAR Foundation engages through member and partner organisations citizens in EU decision making processes, empowers people through lifelong learning and VET, and voices their concerns to the EU institutions by carrying out active lobbying, project management and coordination, policy monitoring, research and awareness-raising.



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